

OASIS

Maryland Institute's recycled shoe factory is open for business

A place for graduate students to hang their theses

By Isaac Rehert

After three years of waiting and fund-raising, of wrecking and planning and finally reconstructing, the Maryland Institute has finally begun to occupy the renovated former Cannon Shoe Company building in the 1300 block of Mount Royal avenue.

Acquiring four spacious new floors of a brick structure, at a cost of about \$2.5 million, has become the impetus for reassessing the entire layout of the art college.

The first result has been consolidation of programs that had been sprawling in rented space across a large section of the neighborhood: in row houses, in an old factory building on Guilford avenue and in the former school building of nearby Corpus Christi church.

Formal occupation of the Cannon building took place with a ceremony last week when the Mount Royal and Hofferger Schools of Painting (both graduate divisions of the institute) moved into the fourth and third floors, respectively.

Plans for the remaining area include space for various handicraft classes as well as offices on the ground floor for administrative staff such as development and public relations.

The building is attractively finished in white, with lots of enormous windows. A high-ceilinged open space decorated with giant colorful student-created paintings greets the visitor as he enters.

"We think we've retained the industrial character of the building," said Mary Ann Lambros, speaking for the administration, on a tour of the new facilities.

That industrial character has been touched up. The steel I-beams that hold up the floors are painted gleaming white. The water pipes ring out their presence in fire-engine red. The steel stairways are bright sunny yellow.

Although much of the newly acquired usable 60,000 square feet will go for consolidation, one innovation that the new space permits is the creation of a Graduate Student Thesis Gallery on part of the third floor.

Ms. Lambros explained.

"Usually, candidates for a master of arts degree are required to write a thesis. The thesis

expresses the learning and original research of the student as he completes his two years of graduate work.

"In an art school, we're not so much interested in a written thesis. What we want to see is the student's output, what he's been working on, what he would choose from two years of work to express his achievement.

"We've never had enough space before to let every student have a thesis show. They've had to show as part of groups, in the Decker Gallery at the station.

"But now, with additional space, we've started having them. Two students will show together for a week at a time. In a 12-week period, every graduate student will get his chance. The shows are open to the public."

On the fourth floor of the building, Aissatou Mijiza and Sarah Colby, whose show runs next week, from Monday through March 2, are getting their creations ready.

Ms. Mijiza, attired in bright flashy colors, could pass for one of the art works that surround her.

Her skin is tan, her lips bright red, and dark turquoise-colored eyeshadow, shaped to winged points in the direction of her temples, fills the space above her lids.

She wears an embossed silver necklace trailing to her waist; and her dangling earrings, which match the necklace, brush against her shoulders.

On her head, a black bandana; across her torso, a high-necked sweater; on her legs, over the narrow black pants that she wears, garters in all the colors of the rainbow.

She works in multi-media constructions, using hearts, faces, the human form and whatever else strikes her fancy.

They are made of shiny red velvet, black nylon, purple fringes, feathers, ribbons—name it, she has found a way to incorporate it into her art.

"I get my inspiration from African and Oceanic cultures," she says in explanation, "and I see this stuff in use in the theater, by musicians, poets and dancers.

"I can't tell you where the inspiration comes from. Some of the images I've been carrying

around with me for years; they just come up.

"Sometimes, I know ahead of time what I want to say—like this one expresses my attitude toward marriage and sex."

The floors are divided into studio spaces, and a couple of cubicles away, Miss Colby is checking over her achievement.

She looks more conventional in her bright clean blue-eyed face, her lavender sweater and gray fatigue pants.

Her work, too, is more accessible. It is paintings on canvas of objects that are actually recognizable—especially with a slight hint from their creator.

A 3-foot-long toothbrush, a leopard coat, a doctor's bag, a bell with a crack in it.

But, she hastily assures her audience, "I don't paint them as objects. In the paintings I insist that they acquire a life of their own."

"That toothbrush isn't a toothbrush in the painting. The black bristles, the flesh-colored handle, the little red knob on the end—they are all doing their own thing. My job is to animate them. On the canvas they have to become something other than something to clean teeth with."

Miss Colby finds these new student thesis shows important—to the student as well as to the public.

"We've been going to art school now for six years. This show forces us to look at our achievement. What have we been doing, what have we been learning all these years.

"I have a lot of work from those years, and for this show I have to edit what I've done, to select what will represent me.

"When I look at that batch of work I've accumulated, a lot of it seems bizarre to me now. Over the years I've changed so much.

"Yet it's also familiar. None of it is so strange that I don't recognize it's me."

Ms. Lambros pointed out that for the public the new student thesis shows may point to the wave of the future. They will provide gallerygoers a chance to see what coming generations of artists are interested in.

The gallery in the Cannon building, directly across the street from the main building, will be open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekdays and from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays.



Sun photos—Walter M. McCardell
SARAH COLBY



AISSATOU MIJIZA